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State Department of Agriculture Counts Estray Horses on Virginia Range

Reno 3/15/05 – The Nevada Department of Agriculture took to the sky last week to count estray horses on the Virginia Range. The count takes place every year around this time so officials can start putting together their herd management plan for the summer months.

NDOA contracts an airplane and pilot through their Wildlife Services division. The plane is a Piper Super Cub which is powerful and capable of low flying maneuvers. It also has a large, clear canopy to make counting the horses easier. The pilot, Scott Jensen based in Winnemucca, has thousands of hours flying these sorts of missions for Wildlife Services.

NDOA asked a graduate student from the University of Nevada's College of Agriculture Biotechnology and Natural Resources to count the horses. Meeghan Gray used a hand-held GPS unit to coordinate geography with the horse's locations. After two full days of flying the official count for the project was 806 horses.

Under Nevada Revised Statute 569.010, the Nevada Department of Agriculture is in charge of the control, placement and disposition of all estray and feral livestock on private and State land. According to studies, the Virginia Range can support about 600 estray horses. NDOA conducts a yearly count and does roundups based on these studies. NDOA also sets up traps, based on nuisance or danger to the general public or the estray horses.

"With a particularly tough winter, and West Nile Virus last year, we are not surprised that the numbers are slightly lower than last year at this time," said Dr. David Thain, State Veterinarian. "Our goal is to keep these estray horses, and the range land where they roam, healthy," Thain added.